

Montreal offers 'light therapy' in pandemic winter

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In the heart of downtown Montreal, residents of a city battered by months of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic can now indulge in a little seasonal "light therapy".

A special sound and light display has been set up to try to bring some

comfort to Montreal.

On Festival Square, Montrealers can marvel at imposing luminous zoetropes, fast-revolving wheels that project illustrations from twelve books written from Quebec in a way that makes the images seem like animation.

Sitting inside one of these 19th-century pre-cinematic contraptions, Alison Abrego and Salma Houaichi, both 27, push a lever towards each other that rolls the illustrations on the cylinder, giving the impression that the images are coming to life.

"I think we all need therapy this year, more than other years. Keeping these activities accessible and free in the city helps us get out of our bubbles a bit, with everything being so restricted, and see something else," Houaichi told AFP.

"It's super important for your morale, for your mental health", said Abrego.

"The principle of light therapy is to light up the mind a little, to wake us up, to keep us animated," said Olivier Girouard, designer of the work entitled Loop.

Organizers say the installation, entitled "Light therapy, beating heart," and which is the eleventh time the annual Montreal event has been staged, is intended to be "fun, interactive."

It is made up of five light and sound installations that will remain in place until March 14, 2021.

"We wanted to make an enveloping, comforting journey," said Catherine Girard Lantagne, acting director of programming for the Quartier des

Spectacles Partnership.

"A comforting journey is a journey with music that is soft, piano sounds, with a little snow falling, with works like that, through which we wander, where we take pictures," she said.

Every evening at 6:00 p.m., the display of sound and light is projected on to the facades of numerous buildings in the city.

For about five minutes, a heartbeat resounds in the streets accompanied by red lighting that symbolizes solidarity, at a time when the city's vibrant restaurant and theater scene has been forced to close.

"The heart of Montreal is still beating, the heart of culture is still beating, that is part of the message we wanted to send," said Girard Lantagne.

On the first weekend of December, some 3,000 people came to see the launch of the display, according to the organizers.

"It is very safe as an experiment," said Girard Lantagne, pointing to signs that remind the public of the health authorities' recommendations.

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